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ABSTRACT

In this study it was hypothesized that if a young reader repeatedly chooses a serial book for pleasure reading, then appreciation and ability to choose and recognize quality works will diminish. Four sixth-grade English classes recorded their independent reading choices for five months. Those who habitually read series books were chosen for the study. These students were then interviewed to determine their reasons for choosing both their series and non-series independent reading and their perceptions on the literacy quality of these books. The findings in this study did not support the hypothesis. (Contains 37 references and 5 tables of data.) (Author/RS)

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The Effects of Reading Serial Books on Children's Appreciation for Quality Literature

By

Holly Nixon

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts

accepted 4/11/00

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Abstract

In this study it was hypothesized that if a young reader repeatedly chooses a serial book for pleasure reading, that appreciation and ability to choose and recognize quality works will diminish.

Four sixth grade English classes recorded their independent reading choices for five months. Those who habitually read series books were chosen for the study. These students were then interviewed to determine their reasons for choosing both their series and non-series independent reading and their perceptions on the literacy quality of these books.

The findings in this study did not support the hypothesis.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page number

I. Abstract ii

II. Acknowledgements iii

III. List of Tables v

IV. The Effects of Reading Serial Books on Children's Appreciation for Quality Literature

Introduction 1
Hypothesis 2
Procedures 3
Results: Analysis of Data 5
Implications 11
Conclusions 13

V. Serial Books and Literature Appreciation: Related Research 16

VI. References 29

VII. Appendices 33

Appendix A: Teacher's Recommendations for Further Reading of Similar Fantasy Stories
Appendix B: Comparison of Fantasy Literature

List of Tables

Table I	Independent Reading Books Chosen by the Students to be Discussed in the Interviews
Table II	Category of Responses to Open-Ended Question: Percentages of Responses to Non-Series and Series Books
Table III	In Comparing a Series Book with a Non-Series Book
Table IV	Are You Like or Unlike the Character(s) Within the Book?
Table V	How Did You Choose Your Independent Reading Book?

In order for a person to become proficient at a particular task, they must first acquire a basic knowledge and then practice the skills. It is no different for the task of reading. A proficient reader needs to practice the reading skills. The more practice that is done, the more honed the skills, and the more successful the student. Success in reading at an early age can lead to a positive academic future.

There is no denying that reading a book from a numbered series for independent and recreational purposes can provide this needed practice. The familiarity of the theme, characters and style of a particular series, the availability of the series, and the numerous books within a series all lend itself to repetition.

Adults, though, question the quality of these books. A majority of them lack depth and substance, the character development is poor, the settings are not detailed, and there is a uniform blandness to the style. The young reader is simply a consumer towards which the publishers wish to push their product. The quality of writing is not the only negative aspect of serial books that has been questioned by adults. The explicit and implicit messages within the books have been thought to be inappropriate for young readers.

However, despite these drawbacks and negative criticism from the adult community, serial books have always sold well and have consistently appeared on, and at times dominated, the **Publisher's Weekly** list of children's best sellers.

There is a need to study the reasons a young reader chooses a particular independent reading book. What is drawing the reader towards a serial book? Can the young reader find the same qualifications for the attraction in a non-series book? Can parents, teachers, and librarians take any steps to facilitate the leap from serial reading to

recommended quality literature? Or is the young reader destined to continue the cycle of familiarity without the intellectual challenge?

There is a growing concern among parents, teachers, and librarians that the young reader is choosing to read serial books in lieu of quality recommended children's literature. If a young reader chooses a serial book for pleasure reading, it is felt that appreciation and the ability to choose and recognize quality works will diminish.

Hypothesis

A young reader will not return to recommended literature after habitually choosing serial books as their desired genre.

Population

The population for this study is sixth graders from a private New Jersey suburban school. All sixth graders, in this school, were required to keep records on their independent reading. These records were collected over a five month period; September through January. Those students who showed a habitual interest in serial books, equal to or more than three, were included in this study. The parents of these students gave permission for their children's involvement in this study.

Because this study focuses on students' responses to independent reading and their perceptions of the literary quality of series books and non-series books, it was decided to present the students directly with the questions.

This study was modeled after one previously conducted by Adele A. Greenlee, Dianne L. Monson, and Barbara M. Taylor in 1996.

Procedures

The questions were asked of the students in individual interviews approximately 15 minutes in length in a quiet space outside of the classroom. The students were told by the interviewer that she was interested in how people their age felt about books they have chosen to read by themselves. The interviewer asked the students to look through their independent reading logs and choose two books to discuss. They were to choose one book from a numbered series and one that was not from a series.

It was important that the two books chosen for the interview represented both high-quality literature and formula series books. After the interviews, the non-series books were checked to see that they had received at least one positive review in an accredited reviewing journal or magazine. The series books were also checked to determine that they were written to a formula and part of a numbered juvenile series.

The system developed by Purves and Rippere (1968) was used to describe and record the students' responses. Their system used five categories of responses to open-ended questions:

1. engagement-involvement
2. retelling
3. interpretation
4. perception
5. evaluation

The Questions

Part I

The students were asked to tell about each book...

1. what they thought about when they remembered the book.
2. how they were like or unlike the characters.
3. how they came to choose the book.

Part II

The students were asked to compare the two books by telling which book...

1. they liked better.
2. they would recommend to a friend.
3. would be better for teacher to read aloud.
4. would be better for a group study in the classroom.
5. was written by a better author.

Results

As shown in Table I, one author dominated the series books chosen by students to be discussed in the interviews, but a range of authors and content were selected in the non-series category.

TABLE I

Independent Reading Books Chosen by the Students To Be Discussed in the Interviews

# of students	Series Books
3	**Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone** by J.K. Rowling
5	**Chamber of Secrets** by J.K. Rowling
1	**Prisoner of Azkaban** by J.K. Rowling
1	**Amber Brown** by Paula Danziger
1	**Sniff** by Donald E. Westlake
1	**Little Myth Marker** by Robert Asprin

Non-Series Books

# of Students	
1	**Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt Everest Disaster** by Jon Krakauer
1	**An American Story** by Jacques Godbout
1	**Lyddie** by Katherine Paterson
2	**Holes** by Louis Sacher
1	**Mean Streak** by Carolyn Wheat
1	**David and Max** by Gary Provost
1	**Fallen Angels** by Walter Dean Meyers
1	**Paper Lion** by George Plimpton
1	**Harriet the Spy** by Louise Fitzhugh
1	**Taking Terri Mueller** by Norma Mazer
1	**Great Gatsby** by F. Scott Fitzgerald

The data obtained from the student interviews was analyzed using four different Tables. Table II categorized the students' responses to the open-ended question, "what do you think about most when remembering the book?"

TABLE II

Category of Responses to Open-Ended Question:
Percentage of Responses to Non-series and Series Books

Category	Non-Series Book	Series Book
Engagement/Involvement	42%	42%
Retelling	33%	33%
Interpretation	0%	0%
Perception	0%	0%
Evaluation	25%	25%
Totals	100%	100%

Purves and Rippere (1968) developed a system which was used to describe and record students' responses to open-ended questions and allowed for comparison in a study. This system has five categories. The first was one of **engagement and/or involvement** and showed that the reader had been able to live the life of the character(s) and had been able to "participate' in the story. Forty-two percent of the students told of engagement and/or involvement when responding with both the non-series and the series book. The students spoke about interests in topics such as history, magic, sports, and friendships. They were awed by places of mystery and games played on broomsticks. The students spoke of understanding the up and down experiences of friendship, and the emotions and demands of attending school as a pre-teen.

The second category, **retelling**, was simply responses that retold the story in some format. Thirty-three percent of the students' responses were placed in this category for both the non-series and the series books.

In the next category of **interpretation**, the search for meaning within a work, none of the students' responses qualified. The category of **perception**, describing formal aspects of the author's writing, was likewise not discussed by the students in this study.

The final category of **evaluation**, the students' opinion of the book, was used by twenty-five percent of the students for the non-series and the series books.

It was interesting to note that in Table II, the percentages between the non-series books and the series books were exactly the same in each of the five categories. The students were equally divided between these two types of books.

A majority of these sixth grade students, forty-two percent, demonstrated a feeling of involvement with their reading in both non-series books and series books. This

finding is consistent with the research of Greenlee, Monson, and Taylor (1996) who examined students' perceptions of quality literature with that of series books and found that sixty percent of non-series book readers and seventy-two percent of series book readers expressed a personal involvement with the story. These findings are also similar to Christian-Smith (1990) who studied middle school students' responses to romance stories. A 12-year old student in their study explained, "It's just when you're reading you're in some other world, well, not really physically I mean but you imagine you are. Sometimes I feel like I am that person."

TABLE III

In Comparing a Series Book with a Non-Series Book:

	Series Book	Non-Series Book
Which book was liked better?	50%	50%
Which would they recommend to a friend?	66%	33%
Which would be better for a teacher to read aloud?	75%	25%
Which would be better for a group study in the classroom?	0%	100%
Which was written by a better author?	75%	25%

Table III compared the series book with the non-series book through five questions. When asked "which book they liked better," fifty percent of the students

chose the series book and fifty percent chose the non-series book. Thus, in this category, the books were equally matched. When asked "which book they would recommend to a friend," sixty-six percent said the series book while only thirty-three percent selected the non-series book. One student explained his answer by saying, "my non-series book was in a subject area of personal interest that others may not like (history/war)." Another students stated that "with a series book you should read the other books in order to be able to understand what is happening and not all of my friends have read the other books."

In response to the question, "which book would be better for a teacher to read aloud," seventy-five percent of the students selected the series book over twenty-five percent for the non-series book. It was interesting to compare this question with the next question of "which would be better for a group study in the classroom?" The response was an overwhelming one hundred percent of the students choosing the non-series book. At first glance, these questions might be expected to elicit a similar percentage for response due to the fact that they both involve teacher use. However, these students have demonstrated a belief that a book read aloud in class needs to be of interest to a majority of the students, which is also supported by the sixty-six percent series book response to the question of "which would they recommend to a friend".

It is interesting to note, in this study it was hypothesized that if a young reader chooses a serial book for pleasure reading, appreciation and the ability to choose and recognize quality works would diminish, but the findings in this study appear to disprove this statement. The students in this study were selected due to their habitual use of serial

books. Despite their preference for serial books, one hundred percent of these students determined that the non-series book would be better for a group study in the classroom.

Almost as a contradiction to the above statement, seventy-five percent of the students stated that the series books were written by better authors. This could have been influenced by several factors. First, Williams, Winter, and Woods (1938) found that as subject matter matched students personal lives, they (the students) found it more difficult to be detached about judging an author's writing ability.

TABLE IV

Are you like or unlike the character(s) within the book?

	Series Book	Non-Series Book
Like	**42%**	**66%**
Unlike	33%	8%
Partially	25%	25%

In Table IV the question, "are you like or unlike the character(s) within the book," was answered as like/or partially like by a majority of the students: sixty-seven percent for series book and ninety-one percent for non-series books. Thus demonstrating that more of the students read subject matter that matched their personal lives.

Second, during the course of this study, September 1999 to January 2000, there was tremendous publicity directed towards the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. Children and adults alike scrambled to purchase the first three books in the series, **Harry**

Potter and the Socercer's Stone, **Chamber of Secrets**, and **The Prisoner of Azkaban** and subsequently all three have dominated the **New York Times** best seller's list for over thirty-eight weeks and now have 7.5 million books in print in twenty-eight languages, as of this writing. The Harry Potter character is a skinny young orphan with unruly black hair, green eyes, and a jagged lightening bolt emblazoned on his forehead. At age eleven he discovers he is a wizard and thus begins his journey into an enchanted magical realm. Through the book the readers move easily back and forth between the closely interwoven wizard world and the normal, everyday world.

"Rowling's secret is as simple and mysterious as her uncanny ability to nourish the human hunger for enchantment: she knows how to feed the desire not just to hear or read a story but to live it as well" (Gray, 1999). "Rowling demonstrates a considerable emotional range. She can be both genuinely scary and consistently funny, adept at both broad slapstick and allusive puns and wordplay" (Gray, 1999).

Apparently, due to this series' recent releases, critical acclaim, and media attention, seventy-five percent of the series books chosen by the students in this study were from the J.K. Rowling series.

TABLE V

How did you choose your independent reading book?

	Series Book	Non-Series Book
Friends Recommended	5	1
Parents Recommended	1	2

Teacher/Librarian Recommended	0	2
Bookstore	0	3
Given	2	1
Library	3	2
Advertisement	1	1
Totals	**12**	**12**

Table V summarizes how the students came to choose their independent reading books and it shows that forty-six percent of all students chose a book (both series and non-series) based on a recommendation. These recommendations, from friends, parents, teachers, and librarians, could have also been influenced by the J.K. Rowling's fantasy world.

Implications

This study can help us understand the appeal of series books and independent reading in general, but certain factors need to be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. Purves and Rippere (1968) remind educators that "a student's responses will be like an iceberg: only a small part will become apparent to the teacher or even to the student himself" (p. xiii). The students in this study can only articulate their opinions, emotions, and thoughts as appropriate for their age development.

The students in this study may not adequately represent a complete balance of student population. In September students in four English classes began the study by recording their independent reading material. By the end of January two factors became apparent. First, only twelve of the students from the four classes habitually read series books and thus qualified for this study. Second, each student had read only two to four books. Originally this figure was expected to be significantly higher. Upon further questioning of the teachers and the students, it was revealed that for sixth graders the increasingly demanding level of schoolwork, homework, sports, and special projects leaves a small amount of time for independent pleasure reading. This is an unfortunate reality. As educators we understand that there is precious little time in the school day and the curriculum requirements, coupled with the necessity to meet the individual needs of each student and the desire to enrich and enhance upon the standard educational experience, can prove to be taxing on our time limitations. Despite this, it would behoove our students for our schools to provide a DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) or SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) time during the day. Generally speaking this is a normal activity in the Kindergarten through fourth grades, but becomes a rarity in upper grades. This should not be the case. According to Helen Huss (1973), one aspect of a literary program should include helping students realize that literature is for entertainment and can be enjoyed throughout an individual's life.

Further study involving a larger student population might reveal more information. Perhaps a lower grade would provide a larger quantity of recreation books read. A comparison between a public and private school setting would also be revealing. Would economic factors, teacher and parent influences, and availability of materials play

a role in a student's decision of independent reading materials? Unfortunately, the time restraints in this study hampered further investigation.

It was evident from these findings that recommendations from friends, teachers, librarians, and parents, and the focus of media attention and advertising can have significant influences upon a student's choice of book selection. The results also showed that the students rank involvement and/or engagement as a major factor in the overall enjoyment of a book. Schools can capitalize on these statements by providing extensive reading materials. Multiple copies of popular, recommended titles could be made available. Teachers can poll the students to determine their interest areas and then supply books in these areas. Students who have finished their favorite books could donate them to the classroom for others to share. "Rows of shelves in libraries are often intimidating to children who cannot find books shelved by author. Displays of books by subject or genre might help these children" (Greenlee, Monson, and Taylor, 1996).

Conclusions

What is drawing the reader towards a serial book? The findings in this study suggest that the subject matter and the high degree of engagement and/or involvement draw the reader to these books. Being able to fully emerse themselves within the lives of characters and finding a common link or bond with the characters further increases the serial books' attraction.

The social aspect of reading a serial book was also evident. "Sharing books and talking about them with friends are important experiences" (Reid and Cline, 1997).

Nodelmen (1996) noted that one of the pleasures of literature is social interaction, discussing responses to books with others.

Can the reader find the same qualifications for the attraction in a non-series book? Apparently so, according to this study's results. The differences, as found in Tables I, II, and III, between the series books and the non-series books differed only slightly.

Can parents, teachers and librarians take any steps to facilitate the leap from serial reading to recommended quality literature? Or is the young reader destined to continue the cycle of familiarity without intellectual challenge? Yes, we can facilitate the move. If a student exhibits an interest in fantasy books, others along a similar vein can be introduced. For example, if a student likes the **Prisoner of Azkaban** where Harry takes a magic bus into another world, the **Phantom Tollbooth** by Norton Juster where Milo drives through a magic tollbooth into another world can be suggested. By providing a source, such as charts, to show these similarities and providing the means to access the materials, students can broaden their literary horizons. (See appendices for one teacher's recommendations.)

Does the trend in reading series books interfere with the readers' appreciation for non-series literature? Will they even recognize the literacy quality of recommended books when they read them? The students interviewed in this study stated a qualified yes. One hundred percent of the students answered that the non-series book would be better for a group study in the classroom. Thus, apparently demonstrating their recognition for quality literature.

In conclusion, teachers, librarians, and parents who take the time to help students find appealing books, and give them the opportunity to read and share their reading

experiences will find rewarding results. When students are personally involved in independent reading, their enjoyment may truly be the beginning of a lifetime reading experience.

SERIAL BOOKS AND LITERATURE APPRECIATION: RELATED RESEARCH

A school's literature program is an important aspect of the curriculum. A good program should have the following five objectives, according to Helen Huss (1973),

1) A literature program should help students realize that literature is for entertainment and can be enjoyed throughout an individual's life.
2) A literature program should help students understand the formal elements of literature.
3) A literature program should acquaint children with their literary heritage. It must foster the preservation of knowledge and allows its transmission to future generations.
4) It should help children grow up understanding themselves and the rest of humanity.
5) The program should assist children in evaluating what they read, extending both their appreciation of literature and their imaginations.

The books used in such a program need to be selected carefully in order to achieve a balance amongst these five objectives. It is the role of the teachers and librarians to make these selections for the program and to teach and model the importance and methods to achieving a balanced approach to reading.

Individuals seek a balance in all realms of life. Many adults spend a majority of their lives seeking the correct balance between work, recreation, and family. Individuals who can not find this balance have difficulty with addictions. These addictions come in forms such as eating disorders, alcoholics, and drug dependency. As educational professionals, we have an opportunity and a duty to teach the methods and give the students the tools needed to make decisions in achieving a balance in life.

One of these balances can be found in reading. To read only textbooks and basals would be inappropriate, to read only quality literature would lack the phonetic instruction

needed, and to read strictly recreational books would not be sufficient to develop the necessary skills and schema background needed. A combination, or blend, of textbooks/basals, quality literature, and recreational materials is the appropriate and effective method to achieving a balanced reading program. Together these tools will provide the skills and information, schema background, exposure to formal elements of literature, broad vocabulary, and entertainment elements needed.

The balance between independent pleasure reading and reading for intellectual knowledge has been outlined by many educators such as Dora V. Smith, Lou La Brant, Daniel Fader, and G. Robert Carlsen. Upon this advice, most contemporary school reading programs now have students actively involved in two types of reading; the recommended literature book and the independent pleasure book. Thus, complementing the cerebral and emotional portions of the reading experience.

Although the recommended literature helps to further academic knowledge and intellectual stimulation of the student, the role of the pleasure book should not be underestimated. When asked, many teachers and librarians cite the joy of reading as the reason they entered the educational field. In Luann Reid and Ruth K.J. Cline's study (1997), they describe avid readers as those who encounter numerous, positive reading experiences. Their tone is enthusiastic and often nostalgic. Many describe themselves as "fanatic, voracious, or obsessed" readers and refer to their reading as an "addiction or a compulsion". Most participants in the study cited series novels as their favorite reading.

The role of recreational and independent reading is a vital ingredient in the recipe for proficient reading. It can stimulate an interest and desire to read in the student. In addition to ample research in support of the powerful relationships between interest and

learning (Hidi, 1991; Schiefele, 1991), there is evidence that light reading material can promote fluent reading and vocabulary development, lead to better attitudes towards reading, help develop the linguistic competence necessary for reading more difficult materials, and typically give students the confidence and drive to read more sophisticated materials (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988; Dorrell & Carroll, 1981; Mathabone, 1986; Parrish & Atwood, 1985).

In order for a person to become proficient at a particular task, they must first acquire a basic knowledge and then practice the skills. It is no different for the task of reading. A proficient reader needs to practice the reading skills. The more practice that is done, the more honed the skills. There is no denying that a serial book can provide this needed practice. The familiarity of the theme, characters and style of a particular series, the availability of the series, and the numerous books within a series all lend itself to repetition.

The skill of choosing an appropriate book to read is part of becoming a reader. Webster's definition of appropriate is "fitted to a purpose or use." Thus the appropriateness of a book varies with the individual reader. The reader's ability, interest, and intentions are all factors to be considered when choosing a book. Therefore, literature self-selection is a highly personal process. H.E. Ollmann (1999) conducted a study regarding how junior high school students choose literature for independent reading. The study asked the questions: What strategies do students use to make their choices? Are they successful in their choices? When unsuccessful, is the result motivating or discouraging? Ollmann used two questionnaires with 104 seventh grade students. In the first form the students checked any of the ten listed strategies used to

select a story. For the second questionnaire, the students read the story and then rated the strategies according to how useful they had been in predicting the contents of the story.

The conclusions of this study are telling. 1) Subject matter was of great importance; even more than text difficulty. 2) Students mistakenly assumed that the only purpose of fiction titles was to label story content. They did not perceive that the author was enticing them to read or hinting at a theme. 3) Teacher modeling of prereading strategies strongly influenced reading behaviors. The author had demonstrated reading the editor's introduction, which was one of the most frequently used and highest rated by students (Ollmann, 1993).

The implications of this study are applicable to all classrooms, and in particular programs in which students are having difficulty choosing appropriate independent reading material. Since subject was of paramount importance, teachers should help students discover and develop their literary tastes. Teachers should expect students will challenge themselves to attempt difficult reading on interesting subjects and this effort will occasionally result in frustration. It is important that since titles, book cover summaries and book jacket illustrations can be misleading, teachers should instruct students to use multiple strategies when choosing a book (Ollmann, 1993). Teachers and students should also discuss strategy and criteria for abandoning books which are not liked or too difficult. Students need to know that even proficient readers abandon dull or confusing books. The skill of knowing when to abandon is one which every reader needs.

Series books have been a popular form of recreational reading for many years. In the beginning of the 1900's, Wheeler (1920) found that half of the readings of girls ages

11-14 came from series books. During this same time period, Edward Statemeyer supervised the writing of 125 different series including the Hardy Boys, Bobbsey Twins, and Nancy Drew. And in a 1926 survey by the American Library Association, 98% of the 36,000 children responding listed one of the Statemeyer series books as a favorite book (Moran and Steinfirst, 1985).

In the late 1980's Ann M. Martin's Baby-Sitters Club series made publishing history with five titles on a single **B. Dalton's** best sellers list and by placing first, second, and third on one **Publishers Weekly** list of best sellers for middle readers (Sebesta and Neeley, 1989).

R.L. Stine's Goosebumps series books for middle grades and his Fear series for teenagers have been dominating recent **Publishers Weekly** best sellers' lists. These series books have made Stine the best selling author in the United States and possibly the world. He writes two books a month. His publisher, Scholastic, prints 1 million copies of each title, and the books sell out in two weeks. Since 1989, he has sold 90 million copies of his books. On the first page of its 1995 annual report, Scholastic credits him with driving company sales up 60% (Jones, 1995).

What is the seemingly powerful attraction of the series books? What pulls the reader back to the series for another book? Teachers P.O. Richards, D.W. Thatcher, M. Shreeves, P. Timmons, and S. Barker (1999), proposed that there were five reasons why a young reader would choose a series book over a non-series one.

1) A series book targets the personal interests of young people. The stories are exciting, hold the reader's attention, and the plot moves quickly. The concept of other young people, the characters within the books, encountering mystery adventure, romance, or

suspenseful situations is appealing to students. The reader wishes it were he in the story, but is also comforted by the safety of knowing it is simply a story. This interest leads to a motivation to read again.

2) One of the most attractive features of serial novels for readers is their availability. Readers do not have to find anything new to read until they are ready to. If they like the characters, plot, or style, they simply await the next title (Reid and Cline, 1997). Rows of shelves in libraries can be intimidating to children and it can be a daunting task to find a book on a favorite subject. Students are able to find a book in a series with ease in a bookstore or library. By returning to a familiar spot on the shelf, all difficulty is removed.
3) There is also a decidedly social aspect to reading a series book. Student carry their books to school and others that are reading similar, if not the same, series books can partake in conversations centered on the book's subject matter. Sharing books and talking about them with friends are important experiences (Reid and Cline, 1997). Nodelman (1996) noted that one of the pleasures of literature is social interaction, discussing responses to books with others.
4) Young readers seem to gain pleasure in competing to see who can collect and read the most books in a particular series. Nodelman (1996) states that in a consumer culture, such as ours, marketing and advertising influence children. Toys and books often come in collectible sets. There is significance to owning complete sets.
5) The plots and storylines of the series books tend to evoke emotional responses, rather than cerebral responses, and emotions play an essential role in entertainment (Reid and Cline, 1997).

A.A. Greenlee, D.L. Monson, and B.M. Taylor (1996) conducted a study regarding whether the habitual reading of serial books affected a young reader's appreciation for recommended literature. The study was based on interview surveys asking 11 and 12-year-old students questions regarding their independent reading books. The students in this study had read both recommended books and serial books as independent reading choices. The results of this study showed that 56% of the students preferred the recommended book to the serial book. A significant majority of 80% stated that a recommended book would be better for group study in a reading class. Thus suggesting that the ability to recognize the literary quality of a recommended book was not hampered.

The implications of this study are: 1) The special magic of books is the experience of living the lives of the characters and being engaged in the events of the story. For many children, involvement comes easily with series books, which are carefully targeted to the identified interests and dreams of a particular gender and age group. 3) Although independent reading was a private experience for these children, the social aspect was also evident and important to them. Providing class time for independent reading could establish the social atmosphere that helps children want to read. 4) Books in a series were relatively easy for children to select, 44% of the students chose a serial book due to this ease. Providing support would help them expand their reading choices. Displaying books by subject or genre might be useful. Schools could also capitalize on students' desires for shared experiences by borrowing marketing techniques of having multiple copies of books available and compiling a classroom best sellers' list (Ollmann).

The implications of this study can provide insight for teachers in guiding students in their quest for appropriate reading material. Students who are given the support in finding good literature and the opportunity to participate in a variety of creative response modes may experience growth in self-understanding, imagination and creativity, knowledge of their world, and the ability to see the world through the eyes of someone different from themselves.

However, despite the overriding popularity and attraction of serial books to young readers, adults in the community have long since criticized the genre. Most book review sources ignore series books. Journals that do review them, generally print the reviews in a special section that makes their subliterary status clear (Greenlee, 1996). In the formula series books, the plot structure and characters often change little from title to title. R.L. Stine, himself, acknowledges that in his books "nobody learns and nobody grows. Mostly they're just running" (Jones, 1995, p.80H). A majority of serial books lack depth and substance, the character development is poor, the settings are not detailed and there is a uniform blandness.

The quality of writing is not the only negative portion of serial books. The messages within the books have received criticism. The plot structures of the teen romance serials reflect and reinforce a patriarchal society (Radway, 1984). The young heroines find themselves fulfilled and identify primarily through romance (Greenlee, 1996). Christian-Smith (1990) also raised objections to the teen romances for their portrayal of a world that is primarily white and affluent. The series books have been criticized by those who object to the more explicit nature of the teen romances (Sutton, 1985).

The Goosebumps series has been negatively received by adults who are troubled that the subject matter will foster a fear and anxiety in children and promote an unhealthy interest in the macabre.

It may seem that reading stories containing frightening elements would harm vulnerable children, causing them undue emotional harm. This is not the case for most children. C.S. Lewis (1966) pointed out that though books may contain frightening situations, scary books themselves do not cause fear. "The difference between scary book and horrified child is a wide one," states Stevenson (1996, p.314). Authors of scary books do not set out to intentionally terrify children and they actually are able to introduce methods of controlling fear (Richards, et al., 1999). Bettelheim (1976) contends that books that allow children to see they are not the only ones with fears and that suggest ways to solve problems presented by these fears are immediately meaningful to young readers. Scary books allow children to actively participate in the story in ways that other media do not.

"The child is able to stop and go as he pleases and has the ability to achieve mastery over potentially frightening material" (Kellerman, 1981, p.270). This sense of control enables children to master their fears (Crosser, 1994; Robinson et al., 1991). Each success in mastering a fearful situation strengthens the child's ability to cope with future fearful obstacles (Crosser, 19994).

The Richards et al., 1991 study concludes that scary stories neither promote an unhealthy interest in the macabre nor instill undue fear and anxiety. Teachers and other adults must trust children's interest in scary books and recognize the role of fear

in children's normal development. In addition to providing entertainment, scary stories can be useful for helping children master fearful situations.

It is also important for teachers and parents to inform children of the concept of suspended belief. When a reader opens a fictitious book, they need to know and understand that this is simply a story and it is not reality. When a reader embarks on the journey of a book, the author is asking them to pretend and to use their imaginations. The reader must be willing to suspend their present beliefs of reality and to venture into the author's world of fiction. If the author can transport the reader into another world and have them become a part of the characters, then the author has succeeded as a writer. The degree of success is directly proportional to the depth, detail, interaction and development of the story elements.

When choosing a recreational book, one should not simply notice that a book is part of a numbered series and become wary. No, there are serial books which are to be commended and eagerly devoured; C.S. Lewis' **Chronicles of Narnia**, Madeline L'Engles' **Wrinkle in Time**, Laura Ingalls Wilder's **Little House on the Prairie**, and Lucy Maud Montgomery's **Anne of Avonlea**. These, and others, are wonderfully written works with thoughtful and intricate plots, interacting characters with dimensions and depth, and descriptive settings. Although set in various times and places, they all stress the values of family, collaboration, and integrity. Their "spunky" heroines and heroes confront obstacles of various sorts and triumph over adversity. The plot varies from book to book, but readers appreciate the familiarity of learning more about the characters they already know (Reid & Cline, 1997).

A relatively new series to emerge is the Harry Potter books by Scottish author J.K. Rowling. She is writing children's fantasy books that feature a young wizard-in-training and involve magic and adventure. "Much like Roald Dahl, J.K. Rowling has a gift for keeping the emotions, fears, and triumphs of her characters on a human scale, even while the supernatural is popping out all over. The book is full of wonderful, sly humor and the characters are impressively three-dimensional (occasionally, four-dimensional!) and move along seamlessly through the narrative"(Rowling, 1997).

However, even this acclaimed new series is drawing criticism from the adult community. "Newspaper reports from California, Georgia, and Minnesota suggest there are parents who do not want their children reading the books because they address dark topics. They think the Harry Potter books are dangerous because they involve children and the occult" (Galley, 1999).

Adults are always suspicious of anything children enjoy too much, and the popularity of the Harry Potter books has caused quite a stir. A group of Christian parents in South Carolina were so alarmed by Harry's intrigues with wizardry that they recently appealed to the State's Board of Education to pull the books from classrooms and libraries. "The books have a serious tone of death, hate, lack of respect, and sheer evil," a Columbia, S.C. mother told the board (Crittenden, 1999).

However, these same books have been turning young children into avid readers. Parents are marveling that their nonreading children (even boys!) are tearing through the Potter books and begging for more (Gray, 1999). And is this not the whole purpose of teaching reading? To have children become readers and to foster a desire

to read more is the foundation of all learning and knowledge and will lead to their ultimate success as adults. "There has been a growing tendency of schools to resort to complicated, expensive, and frequently ineffective methods of encouraging or coercing students to read. Perhaps the answer to motivating students to read is as simple as encouraging them to follow their interests" (Worthy, J., Moorman, M., and Turner, M., 1999).

If the Harry Potter series is coming under attack, should not J.R.R. Tolkien's **The Hobbit** series and **The Narnia Chronicles** by C.S. Lewis also be criticized for the same reasons? They are all wonderfully written works involving the supernatural. What prods the community to be wary of one series and not the other?

Educators and parents are torn between wanting to see children reading and not wanting them to read inappropriate material. It is natural for parents, teachers, and librarians, who are concerned about children's reading habits to have questions (Greenlee, 1996).

There is a need to further study the reasons a young reader chooses a particular independent reading book. What is drawing the reader towards a serial book? Can the reader find the same qualifications for the attraction in a non-serial book? Can parents, teachers and librarians take any steps to facilitate the leap from serial reading to recommended quality literature? Or is the young reader destined to continue the cycle of familiarity without intellectual challenge? Does the trend in reading series books interfere with the readers' appreciation for non-series literature? Will they even recognize the literacy quality of recommended books when they read them? And will they ever read them?

By conducting a study on the students' responses to their own recommended and independent book choices, educators and parents can obtain valuable information. This information can be used to expand available classroom reading selections and provide insight on how to assist young readers in finding future reading selections and expanding their literary horizons.

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